



McQUEEN: Magnificent Seven . .

Planning The Great Escape . .

Playing a ruthless cop in Bullitt . .

Crook in Thomas Crown Affair



# I PRAYED

## Steve McQueen's daughter tells for the first time of her father's battle with cancer



HER HERO: Daughter Teri with McQueen (left) and her mum (above)

**T**HE daughter of tragic superstar Steve McQueen has told for the first time how she prayed her father would die because she could no longer bear to watch him suffer in his last, hopeless battle against cancer.

Actress Teri McQueen, Steve's 30-year-old daughter from his first marriage, was so shocked by the fear, the false hopes and the blunders surrounding her father's death nine years ago this month that she now devotes much of her life to helping cancer victims and their families.

Teri says: "My Dad was my

hero, larger than life and indestructible. To watch him slowly wither and die from this disease was more than I could bear.

"The pain in his abdomen would get so intense that he would lie on the floor, writhing in agony. I prayed for his torment to end."

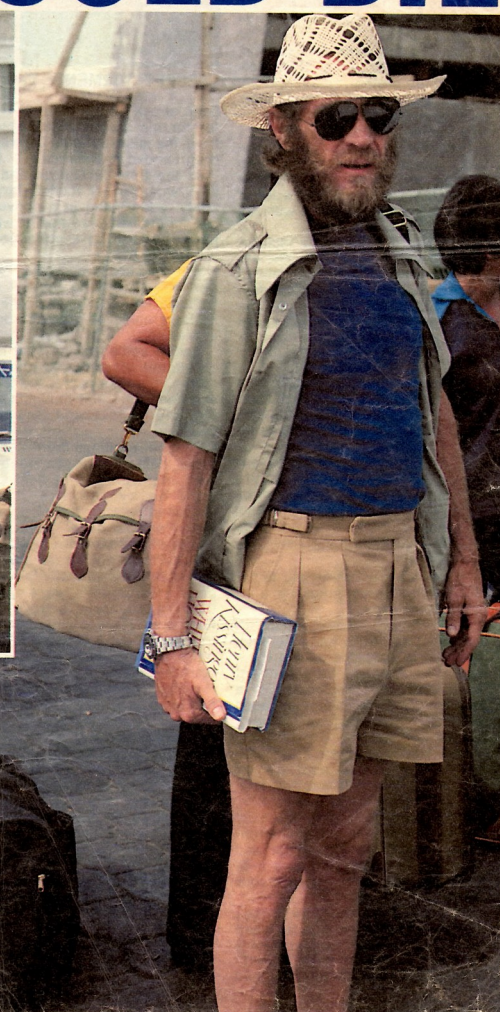
Teri reveals that her father made a tragic mistake in not seeking medical help when he first became ill. Even when he was doubled up with pain, the sexy tough-guy star of *The Great Escape*, *Bullitt* and *The Magnificent Seven* refused to see a doctor because he was afraid to face the truth about his condition. "If only





As a restless jailbird in *Papillon* . . . A fire chief in *Towering Inferno* . . . Chasing runaways in *The Hunter* . . . And a cowboy again in *Tom Horn*

# MY DAD WOULD DIE



**LAST PICTURE SHOW:** Doomed McQueen on his "love boat" trip

he had gone for help," says Teri. "But he waited almost a full year before going to the doctor, even though he was losing weight, had a bad cough and was in immense pain."

"Like a lot of people, Dad was terrified of sickness, and especially cancer. He kept waiting for the problem to go away by itself. He was afraid to know the truth and that fear might have cost him his life."

McQueen was at the height of his fame as one of Hollywood's highest-paid actors when he was first diagnosed as having mesothelioma, a rare form of cancer

usually caused by exposure to asbestos.

Says Teri: "By the time we had convinced Dad to see a doctor the cancer had spread and there wasn't anything anyone could do."

"It was like a cold hand grabbing my heart but Dad told us not to worry because he was going to heal himself. And I truly thought he would."

McQueen gave up smoking and went on a low-fat diet with megadoses of vitamins and minerals. But the disease spread rapidly and his condition deteriorated.

Teri was one of the few people who knew just how ill



her father was as he stubbornly carried on working. He kept his illness secret as he struggled through his last two movies *The Hunter*, the true-life story about a Los Angeles bounty hunter chasing bail jumpers, and *Tom Horn*, a Western co-starring Linda Evans.

But the cancer relentlessly spread throughout his body. He eventually died of a heart attack after a difficult three-hour operation to remove a tumour the size of a football from his abdomen. He was only 50.

Teri says: "I helped to take care of him for almost a year and he was full of hope at first, but as time went on he knew this was one battle he couldn't win."

"When he finally passed away, my world just fell apart completely. Nothing could heal the gaping hole his death left inside me. Not my work, my marriage, anything."

She couldn't even find comfort with her mother, writer Neile Tofel, and her brother, Chad, now 27.

"They were going through their own grieving and there was no one I could talk to," says Teri.

"Holding my anger and bitterness inside me made me even angrier and more bitter. It took close to seven years and a lot of therapy to come to terms with his death."

Now Teri is a travelling lecturer for the American Cancer Society and she says: "I want to help to educate people about early detection and treatment and maybe save some lives and a lot of pain along the way."

### Difficult

"Getting over the death of a loved one is a process and there are no short cuts. But it doesn't have to be so difficult as it was for me."

"Another point I want to put across to people is that we are constantly exposed to dangerous, potentially cancer-causing agents and most of the time we are completely unaware of the risks. We ignore them."

"Even after watching my father die, I didn't stop smoking until three years later."

She added: "Smoking didn't help my Dad but he had also been exposed to asbestos all his life – when he was in the Merchant Navy, and when he worked in a tyre factory. Later, when he raced cars his fireproof suits were loaded with it."

"He was a walking time-bomb for thirty years and never suspected it until it was too late. But although it is too late for him, we can learn from him. We must pay more attention to our environment – what we eat, drink and breathe. And don't be afraid to know the truth – it might save your life."

Teri believes that her father made another tragic blunder when he went to Mexico in search of a "miracle" cure from Dr William Kelley, a former dentist who had



**SECRET TORMENT:** Teri comforted her dad in his last year

been struck off the medical register for his claims to be able to treat the disease with Laetrile, a drug banned in America.

At the time McQueen and his third wife, former model Barbara Minty, were living in a converted hangar outside Los Angeles where he was restoring a collection of vintage aircraft.

When he heard about the "wonder" treatment he moved with Barbara and Teri to live near Dr Kelley's clinic at Rosarito Beach in Mexico.

Before setting off he said in an emotional message to his fans: "Keep your fingers crossed for me and keep the good thoughts coming. All my love and God bless you."

Despite warnings from conventional doctors that the treatment was unproven and at best could only delay the inevitable, McQueen was so full of hope he took Barbara on a "love boat" cruise off the Mexican coast.

They took elaborate steps to conceal their identity because gossip columnists were hinting that the superstar's days were numbered. He was already having trouble getting insurance to make more films in case he could not complete them.

In the weeks before the trip he had become almost a recluse, hiding out at the hangar at Santa Paula airport and going to the local church on Sunday mornings. Eventually, he told Barbara: "We're going away on a big holiday!" At the time, one of the biggest shows on American TV was *The Love Boat*. And the tough guy

actor turned romantic hero when he booked two tickets on the VIP deck to Mexico.

He picked the boat carefully – a luxury liner packed with old age pensioners who had probably never seen his movies and hadn't a clue who he was. But just to be on the safe side he visited a Hollywood make-up store and bought a big, bushy beard and wig.

Even the most ardent Steve McQueen fan would have had trouble picking him out as he walked up the gangplank in San Pedro Harbour on what would be his last vacation. But a photographer managed to smuggle himself aboard and got what proved to be the last pictures of Steve alive.

### Midnight

His final "public" appearance had been at a tiny cinema in Oxnard, a 30-minute drive from Santa Paula, for a sneak midnight preview of his new movie, *Tom Horn*. He wanted to see how the provincial public liked it before it went on general release.

He arrived secretly at the cinema in an old pick-up truck with Barbara and son, Chad. He refused to answer questions on how he felt and sat in the back row watching the film.

Then he sped off into the night, still silent. But he must have been thinking, even then, about his trip to Mexico for his last-ditch attempt at finding a cure.

After a spell of treatment, Dr Kelley boasted: "Steve has actually changed the course of medicine by stepping forward to accept metabolic therapy which

made the quality of his life excellent during the past four months."

But after his death, the doctors in Mexico were accused of being "charlatans and exploiters."

Daughter Teri – recently divorced and the mother of an 18-month-old daughter, Mollie – now reckons she can put the past behind her because she can at last talk about it.

She has had small parts in the American soap *General Hospital* – where Emma Samms first found fame in the States – and in *Lethal Weapon II*.

But her priority now is lecturing about cancer. She says: "If I can get one person in for early diagnosis, if I can spare one family from the nightmare that is cancer, if I can help ease one person's suffering over losing a loved one to this hideous disease, then my dad will not have died in vain."

If Steve McQueen's death was difficult, so was his early life. He was the son of a stunt pilot, Bill McQueen, who did a runner while Steve's mother was still pregnant. Mum then abandoned him when he was six months old.

After McQueen died, people came out of the woodwork to talk about the screen hero.

A distant relative, Robin, who was working as a Hollywood bouncer, accused him of being a depraved woman-hating sadist who tried to murder the grandfather who had once made him go to school in a frock!

Robin alleged: "The family stuck together to protect him while he was still alive. Now the world should know the truth."

And he added: "He was lucky not to have ended up in jail on a murder rap. One night when he was walking home drunk, he stabbed an old man sleeping on a park bench."

"Another time he stabbed his grandfather's dog, Sam, cut off its head and threw it in the kitchen."

But Teri's mum Neile was more kind in her book about her life with McQueen, *My Husband, My Friend, A Memoir*.

She said: "That smile, those eyes, they were really something." Although they broke up and McQueen married *Love Story* star Ali McGraw, Neile claimed she and McQueen never really stopped loving each other.

But she made one astonishing observation about the superhero who made millions of women go weak at the knees. "He didn't really like women," says Neile. "It was all down to his mother ditching him."

ANN PARRY  
MIKE HOUSEGO

**"With those eyes and that smile he really was something special"**